

**Background:**

Since the late 1990s, nationally there has been increasing research into the experiences and needs of children of the incarcerated, their parents and families. Some of this research has focused on the particular trauma experiences of children of the incarcerated and the results of that trauma, including the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, other research has investigated a wide array of related topics including the effects of visitation and contact on children, the prevalence of parenthood amongst inmates, the effectiveness of parenting programs for inmates, the overlap between child welfare, juvenile justice and parental incarceration, the effect of child support debt on noncustodial ex-offender parents, the impact of domestic violence and substance abuse on families with incarcerated parents, and others. Much of this research has come out of universities, and some of the research has been supported by foundations, which have been increasing their presence in this area.

The State of Oregon preceded Washington State in legislating statewide improvements in the policies and services available to children of incarcerated parents, and beginning data collection and analysis on this crucial population that is often served by multiple state and non-state partners. However in 2007, E2SHB 1422 became law in Washington State, which mandated that certain state agencies begin to collect data on children of the incarcerated. These agencies include the Department of Corrections (DOC), Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Department of Early Learning (DEL) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). These agencies regularly meet to update each other regarding data collection and analysis through the medium of the Data Subcommittee of the statewide Children and Families of Incarcerated Parents (CFIP) Advisory Committee. In addition to the research now underway in state agencies, researchers at universities in Washington State have initiated or increased their research in this area.

Within the context of the CFIP Data Subcommittee and related work, a unique partnership developed that allowed for the construction of a database linking children and parents born in Washington State, with Department of Corrections incarceration records and records of services received by children and parents through the Department of Social and Health Services. This generated a preliminary data report that documented the high usage of public services by children of the incarcerated. In order to connect with ongoing research on CFIP in nearby universities, the CFIP Data Subcommittee expanded its partnership and convened a CFIP Research Network with academics and state researchers to collaborate on CFIP related data projects.

**CFIP Research Network: Purpose**

To link state agency and academic researchers and promote effective collaboration and research on children of the incarcerated, their parents and families.

**Goals of the CFIP Research Network:**

- To promote research on the needs, experiences and outcomes of children of the incarcerated, their parents and caregivers.
- To help bridge research and practice by promoting research on effective individual, family-based and community-based interventions that reduce negative outcomes for children, parents and families.
- To enhance and identify opportunities for collaboration between state agencies and universities
- To provide a forum within which researchers can share preliminary data and research findings on projects related to children and families of the incarcerated, and obtain feedback in order to enhance the data's utility and applicability for policy and program development, and related research.
- To provide a collaborative framework for research that has the potential to be developed into a mixed-partner evaluation team for grant-funded programs or research.

**Participants:**

- State agencies engaged in research and data collection on children of the incarcerated, their parents and/or caregivers.
- Researchers based at universities or colleges that are engaged in similar research, or with research interests in this area.

**Structure:**

- Quarterly meetings
- Development of an email-based listserv

**Additional Actions:**

- Engage in conversations with potential funders and identify opportunities to provide evaluation within the context of grant applications
- Connect with similar research projects in other states
- Develop opportunities for dissemination of CFIP research, including preparing documents for publication and/or distributing research results from multiple related projects simultaneously.

**Research Goals and Strategies**

- Follow up on research questions generated by the state agency CFIP data projects, related to priorities set by legislation. Legislation-created priorities include CIP in foster care, CIP that receive state services, intergenerational incarceration, familial economic stability, services to parents, visitation/contact and child welfare reunification (see attached list of questions generated by state projects)

- Further development of outcomes analysis, including longitudinal studies documenting and determining the effects of particular services and interventions on CFIP populations of interest over time, in order to determine effective interventions
- Continue to pursue the inclusion of school outcomes data, and investigate the inclusion of additional data from social service providers such as Children's Administration (child welfare data), and investigate types of data available for CFIP projects from state and university partners.
- Investigate development of an outcomes matrix, to include built in measures for populations served, in order to provide a tool to analyze overall outcomes for CFIP populations
- Support the increasing development of data collection and infrastructure for research
- Investigate the impact of service to parents while incarcerated, including parenting classes and visitation, on outcomes for both parents and their children.
- Support the development of qualitative studies with children, parents and caregivers

**Lens through which research projects will be conceptualized:**

- 1) Evaluation of the public will for research to be completed on the topic in question. Including legislation, policy work, legislative intent and interest from leadership in the public agencies, funders, universities and other partners.
- 2) Prioritization of research that will assist in determining interventions that can decrease the high needs seen in CFIP families, and the cumulative impact of those needs over time.
- 3) Projects to include evaluation of the disproportionate effect of incarceration on minority communities and certain geographic areas: projects when possible will map or chart rates and effects by county/zip code and separate out findings by racial/ethnic group.

**Foci: Research Questions**

**The following three questions/research areas were discussed and agreed upon as shared foci for the research network.**

- 1) **Parental Recidivism** : including
  - a. Barriers to reunification
  - b. Evaluation of reunification: does reunification have positive results for children?
  - c. Services to parents in correctional systems and after release: evaluating the effectiveness of the service array qualitatively and quantitatively
  - d. Types of crimes parents commit
  - e. Parental risks and protective factors
  - f. Visitation and contact: what effect does this have on recidivism? What variables in family-friendly programming have a positive impact on recidivism and parental participation in services? What are the effects on parental infractions?

- g. What are the outcomes associated with parental mentoring?
- 2) **Resiliency of CFIP families:** including
  - a. Protective factors: what are the qualities of families that deal successfully with reunification with or without accessing public services?
  - b. Prevention: what interventions with high-needs families prior to correctional involvement can contribute to reduced incarceration rates?
  - c. What interventions with JRA involved youth prevent involvement in the adult system as parents?
- 3) **Service needs for correctionally involved families:** including
  - a. Investigating interventions that affect the intergenerational transmission of incarceration
  - b. Children of incarcerated parents not served by the public service systems: are their kids at greater or lesser risk of negative health/social impacts?
  - c. What services do women access before, and after reunification? What needs are identified?
  - d. What is the relationship between court orders and familial visitation and contact?
  - e. In terms of needs and services, what makes CFIP families different from other high-needs families?
  - f. Adults who had offender parents: what is their ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) load?
  - g. How can the cumulative impact of ACE exposure by CFIP families over time and generations be effectively reduced?
  - h. How does correctional involvement by parents and children of incarcerated parents relate to school outcomes measures?
  - i. How do experiences of CFIP families in service need or access differ by race, geography?
  - j. How could an outcomes matrix be generated for parents, children?